

SUMMARY OF MEETING ON CONFEDERATE STATUE
July 27, 2015
Council Office Building

A small group of individuals, most of whom were representing organizations interested in County decisions regarding the Rockville Confederate statue, met with County Council staff on July 27, 2015 to discuss options related to the statue. This document presents a brief summary of their discussion and recommendations.

GROUP MEMBERS

The individuals were chosen with input from Councilmembers to represent a broad spectrum of views regarding the statue. Four of seven of those attending represented organizations directly interested in the statue, two were historians with different points of view regarding the symbolism of the statue, and the seventh person represented the City of Rockville as an observer, but did not participate in the discussion. Members were chosen who were known to have a range of different views, including some members with completely conflicting views on certain issues, such as the intent of those who constructed the statue and its symbolism at that time and in the present. No elected officials were present, but staff from Councilmembers Leventhal's, Katz's and Rice's offices attended as observers.

In attendance:

Anthony Cohen, President, Menare Foundation and Button Farm
Jim Loewen, Historian and Sociologist
Linda Moran, Assistant to the City Manager, City of Rockville
Nancy Pickard, Executive Director, Peerless Rockville
Anita Powell, President of the Montgomery County NAACP and member of the Rockville
Historic District Commission
Laurie-Anne Sayles, President, African American Democratic Club of Montgomery County
Susan Soderberg, Historian

Elizabeth Hughes, Acting Executive Director of the Maryland Historical Trust, was invited but declined to participate.

While individuals were associated with different groups, they were expressing their own opinions and did not (as of the writing of this summary) have the opportunity to seek support from the groups they represent.

CONSENSUS RECOMMENDATIONS

There were three critical recommendations that the group was unanimous in endorsing. First, the story of Montgomery County's participation in the Civil War must be told, but it must be fully told from all perspectives, including those of both Confederate and Union supporters, as well as free blacks and slaves. Regardless of the County's decision regarding the monument, the County should determine how to best share and educate its citizens on its history in public spaces accessible to all.

Second, the group agreed that the County must take some action because the status quo (leaving the statue where it is without any change) does not fully tell the story of the County's history from all perspectives. The group did not believe the option of accepting the current situation without change should be considered further.

Finally, the group agreed that **if** a decision is made to move the statue, an appropriate location with a willing recipient must be identified. This should be done with broad public input from a variety of individuals/organizations interested in the future of the statue.

KEY FACTS

The group began the meeting by addressing key facts and points of agreement that are important to any discussion regarding the statue:

- The statue is on County land and is therefore the property of the County.
- The County Executive is responsible for the management of County owned property and therefore will make decisions regarding the future of the statue. The Council will be responsible for any actions that require budgetary approval.
- The statue is designated historic by the City of Rockville and therefore the County needs to apply to the Rockville Historic District Commission for a "Certificate of Approval" before making any change to the statue, including moving it.
- A historical artifact is representative of its time and the people who created it.
- Historical symbols (and the Confederate Statue specifically) can be interpreted in different ways by different people at different times.
- Whatever is done with the statue will become a part of the history of the statue and will be interpreted by historians of the future.

OPTIONS

The group identified all known options as to what the County should do regarding the statue:

- The group unanimously agreed that the status quo – i.e., to leave the statue in its current location with no additional interpretive information – is not acceptable and that something should be done.
- The group focused on three potential options: destroying the statue, leaving it in its current location with additional interpretation to put it in context, and relocating it.
- There are several sub-options for each of the three main options:

Destroy the Statue

1. Destroy the statue and discard the remains.
2. Destroy the statue and reuse the remains to create another symbol of the County's history.

Retain the statue at its current location with additional information/interpretation.

3. Retain the statue at its current location and build another statue or structure that would represent other parties in or impacted by the Civil War.
4. Retain the statue at its current location and add interpretive elements (such as a plaque or kiosk) explaining the history of the statue and why it is there.

Relocate the statue

5. Put it in storage and identify options for relocation at a later time.
6. Move it to another location with input from a variety of different people/organizations to determine the right location.
7. Donate the statue to a historical organization or return it to the United Daughters of the Confederacy and have them decide where to place the statue.
8. Create a Montgomery County Historical Museum and place it there.

CONSEQUENCES OF EACH OPTION

The group discussed the consequences of each of the three main options.

Comments Regarding the Option of Destroying the Monument

The group members discussed the option of destroying the statue and some members were strongly opposed to this, while others thought it is a potential option. Those opposed felt that destroying it would destroy a primary source and evidence of this time in our history, removing the ability to learn from it and interpret it. Some believed that destruction would further polarize the community. It was also suggested that destroying the statue would be seen by some as an act of vandalism.

Those who supported continued consideration of this option believed that it would imply to those who oppose the statue's presence that they have been heard and that it would eliminate a symbol of racism it implies to some and a symbol of slavery.

Comments Regarding the Option of Adding Interpretative Elements

Those supporting keeping the statue where it is and adding interpretative elements believe this would provide an opportunity to educate the public and tell a fuller, more accurate story of the history of the County's involvement in the Civil War, reflecting all viewpoints, including those of slaves, and the history of the statue itself. (Group members all agreed that it would be critical to have right sources prepare these materials.) Appropriate interpretative materials would provide a better chance to tell the story of slavery in the County and allow for an evolving understanding of history over time.

Those opposed to retaining the statue at its current location, even with interpretative elements, believe its location implies that the courthouse does not represent equal justice for all. Having it stay there would indicate that a part of the community was not heard.

As they discussed this option, the group realized and was in complete agreement that additional interpretive measures were necessary, regardless of whether the statue is moved.

Comments Regarding the Option of Relocating the Statue

Those opposed to moving the statue believe it changes the historical placement and meaning of the statue and also changes the historical context of the place in which it is located. They believe it bends the historical decisions of the past to suit present perspectives. Some believed it downplayed the extreme importance of this issue, particularly if the statue is put into storage with no specific timeframe for relocating it. The statue could be damaged during a move, particularly if it is moved twice (once into storage and a second time to a permanent location).

Those who supported moving it believe the act of moving it is itself a teachable moment, ensconcing the statue with interpretive context. It preserves the statue itself, allowing interested individuals to learn about it in a more appropriate environment. Some believe moving it helps to remove the bias its existence implies. Moving it also allows the creation of a new historical context for the statue in a new location. Moving it would also allow the addition of a historical marker at the courthouse telling that the statue had been there, when it was erected, and when and why it was moved.

PREFERENCES AMONG OPTIONS

Each member of the group was asked at the end of the meeting to indicate which of the three options they preferred.

Three members indicated that they supported either relocating the statue to a place where it will be displayed with accompanying information to add historical context or destroying it. They did not believe that adding interpretive elements alone would be sufficient. Their main reasons for this choice were as follows:

1. The statue should be removed from its current location or destroyed because it does not display a real truth about history as it pertains to the equality, civil and human rights as a true balance. It only depicts one side (commemorating the battle fought over the enslavement of black people) and that is not acceptable. Although it was constructed 102 years ago, it is a different time today with a different agenda.
2. The statue represents a symbol of resistance to the Civil Rights era.
3. If the County does not move or destroy/transform the monument, it tells those who raised the issue -- not only African Americans but many others -- that they have not been heard. They are to trust that the statue, left in place, will eventually get adequately contextualized, but for two reasons this trust is unlikely to develop. First, they know that putting the monument at the courthouse in the first place symbolized the hold that neo-Confederates had on political power in Montgomery County during the Nadir of race relations. Leaving it there now implies that they still do. Second, it is unclear whether new historical context would counterbalance the negative emotions elicited by the statue to any significant degree.
4. The statue symbolizes black suffering rather than communicating the unity and progress reflective of the present day Montgomery County, especially given its placement on the lawn of our Courthouse.

Two group members supported having the statue remain where it currently is but with additional interpretation to more deeply explain its history, that of slavery and the Civil War. They indicated that they would also be willing to support an option for relocating the statue if it could be done properly and

moved directly to a suitable location where it will be protected and interpreted (and not placed in storage). They strongly opposed destruction. Their main reasons for this choice were as follows:

1. The Confederate Soldier Statue is a local example of a custom designed “common soldier” monument, proudly erected in the City of Rockville by the citizens of this County more than 100 years ago. And as such, it is an important vestige of our City and County history and a unique historical artifact of its time.
2. It sets a dangerous precedent to remove or banish long-standing historical artifacts, objects that were created in a very different cultural context but are judged on the basis of contemporary standards and political climate. Destroying or erasing historical artifacts pretends that the past does not exist or can somehow be changed to better suit our current sentiments.
3. Rather than remove this historical artifact, the County can use it as a powerful tool to educate current and future generations in a way that will foster unity. New art could draw on, interpret, and challenge the past in new and inventive ways and it can provide a forum for public education and a setting for private and collective reflection.

One group member only supported adding interpretive elements and would not support destruction or relocation of the statue. Her main reasons are as follows:

1. The monument is an artifact of the past and a primary resource for the interpretation of the past. It tells the story of the history of Rockville and Montgomery County and of all of the inhabitants, black and white, free and enslaved, Union and Confederate. If it were moved, the historical context would be lost and with it part of the story, which is ongoing.
2. The group member supporting this option believes that the monument is currently being totally misinterpreted.
3. The statue is an individual and unique work of art relating specifically to Rockville and Montgomery County. Destroying it would be an act of vandalism.